



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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Organic Handler & Processor Information

What is organic food?

The National Organic Standards Board defines organic agriculture as an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances bio-diversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony. 'Organic' is a labeling term that denotes products produced under the authority of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990.

What is organic certification?

Organic certification means that an independent, third party has verified that the requirements of organic crop production, processing and handling have been met. Under the National Organic Program, all products sold as organic in the United States must be certified by a National Organic Program (NOP) accredited certification agency.

Do all processors and handlers of organic food need to be certified?

Except for handlers and processors exempt or excluded from certification, all processors and handlers of organic food must be certified.

Exemptions

1. Handlers that sell less than \$5,000 worth of organic products.
2. Retail food stores.
3. Processors that produce products with less than 70 percent organic ingredients.
4. Processors that produce products that limit their organic claims to the information panel.

Exclusions

5. Handlers that only sell packaged organic food products.
6. Retailers that have in-store bakeries, delicatessen, salad bar or ready to eat food.

What are the requirements for handlers and processors of organic food?

- Processors and handlers must complete an Organic System Plan.
- Procedures must be in place that ensure that no commingling or misidentification occurs between organic food products and non-organic food products.
- Prohibited substances used within the processing or handling facility must not come in contact or contaminate the organic food products.
- A list of all organic ingredients used in organic products must be provided. All organic ingredients must be certified by NOP accredited certification agencies. A Product Formulation form is included in your application for this purpose.
- Labels for all organic food products must be submitted and approved prior to obtaining organic certification.
- All organic food products must be processed with only approved minor ingredients and processing aids.

Are there restrictions on post-harvest materials, minor ingredients and processing aids that I can use?

Yes. Generally, only naturally derived materials can be used to extend shelf life or storage time. The rules prohibit use of irradiation, synthetic preservatives, fumigants and artificial flavors or colors.

What records am I required to keep?

Complete and accurate records must be kept that track the organic food products from receiving through final sale or shipping. All records must be kept in sufficient detail as to be readily understood and audited and must be sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the National Organic Program. Records must be maintained for five years. An audit of your practices will take place during your organic food inspection to ensure that appropriate records are being kept.

What other Licenses may be required?

A Wholesale Food Processor's License is required when you process a food or beverage to sell wholesale (wholesale is defined as selling your product for resale. For example: restaurants, grocery stores, espresso stands). If you are cutting, mixing (salad mixes, mixing sprouts), re-packing products, roasting coffee, and/or processing any food and beverage products for wholesale distribution you are required to be licensed as a Wholesale Food Processor. Contact Denise Curette, Food Safety Program in Olympia at 360-902-1876 or e-mail: dcurette@agr.wa.gov to get information on the licensing procedure.

How do I get certified?

- Step 1: Complete and submit an Application, Organic System Plan and application fees.
- Step 2: Be available for an inspection. The inspector will review receiving, storage, processing and shipping areas; review productions records, conduct an audit of organic products handled or processed by the facility; and review labels and formulas of organic food products.
- Step 3: After inspecting the facility, an inspection report is reviewed by WSDA staff. If all practices and documentation are in compliance with program standards, an Organic Certificate is issued.

How long does it take to get certified?

New Applicants - If all the necessary information is received in a timely manner, the inspection and certification process takes approximately 90-120 days. Incomplete applications will delay the certification process. Due to the large volume of inspections needing to be conducted, it may take an organic food inspector several weeks to fit a new inspection into their schedule.

Renewal Applicants - Organic certification is an annual procedure. WSDA mails renewal applications in January or February of each year. An application, system plan update, and fee (based on the previous calendar year gross revenue) needs to be submitted to WSDA every year and the renewal application must be postmarked by March 1st. If the renewal application is not postmarked by the due date, a \$75 late fee will be charged. Renewal applicants are issued their organic certificate after their application is received, reviewed, and approved.

Export of WSDA certified Organic Food Products

Europe

Export of WSDA certified organic products to Europe is growing rapidly each year. European Union (EU) regulations differ from US National Organic Standards in several important areas. If a WSDA certified product is going to be used as an ingredient in a processed good certified by a European agency, stricter production, processing, and handling rules will apply. In order to enable your product easier access to European markets, it is recommended that you consider the following information:

- The EU prohibits the use of sodium nitrate on organic crops. WSDA must have documentation to verify that no sodium nitrate has been used on crops intended for export to the European Union. It is highly recommended that you do not use sodium nitrate if any part of your crop is headed for European markets.
- Several European certification agencies prohibit the use of manure from factory farms.
- Several European certification agencies prohibit the use of manure that has come from an animal that has consumed feed, primarily corn and soybeans, that contains Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO).
- Several European certification agencies prohibit the production of any GMO crop on the same holding as an organic crop.
- Several European certification agencies prohibit chlorine substances in post harvest handling.
- European organic standards do not allow antibiotics to be used for disease control in tree fruits.

Japan

JAS certification is required by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries (MAFF) for all retail food products sold as "organic" in Japan. JAS certification can only be granted by a Japanese MAFF approved Recognized Certification Organization (RCO). To obtain RCO status, the certification agency must be based in Japan. Since WSDA is not able to gain RCO recognition, we have built strong working relationships with several Japan based certification agencies. Upon request, WSDA can provide inspections on behalf of Japanese certifiers to determine JAS compliance.

Bulk (non-retail) organic products that do not have the JAS label do not require JAS certification. For bulk products, WSDA must verify that no potassium bicarbonate, lignin sulfonate, or alkali-extracted humic acids have been used in order to issue a USDA Japanese Export Certificate.

Export Certificates

Export Certificates and other documents are often needed to accompany shipments of organic food to foreign markets. Export Certificates verify that the shipment has been produced, handled, and processed in accordance with foreign organic standards. Applications for Export Certificates are available upon request. **If you have further questions pertaining to the export of WSDA certified organic food products, please contact Rachael Jamison at (360) 902-1951 or e-mail: rjamison@agr.wa.gov.**

Organic Advisory Board

The WSDA Organic Advisory Board (OAB) was established in 1987 to advise WSDA concerning the implementation of the Organic Food Program. The OAB consists of organic producers, processors, handlers and other interested parties that meet to discuss the Organic Food Program and recommend policy to the WSDA Organic Food Program. The members of the board include:

- Michael Blakely, Growing Things, Carnation
- Dain Craver, Crave Organic Orchard, Royal City
- Michele Catalano, Pike Place Market CSA Program, Seattle
- David Granatstein, WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, Wenatchee
- Orlin Knutson, Alamo Orchards, Mattawa
- Marilyn Lynn, Rama Farms, Bridgeport
- Alec McErlich, Small Planet Foods, Sedro-Woolley
- Tim Morrissey, Coyote Creek Farm, Rochester
- Harold Ostenson, Pacific Organic Produce, George
- Rick Repp, Northwest Natural Farm, Endicott
- Phil Unterschuetz, Integrated Fertility Management, Wenatchee
- Roger Wechsler, Samish Bay Cheese, Bow

The Organic Advisory Board meetings are open to the public. Contact Miles McEvoy at (360) 902-1924 or mmcevoy@agr.wa.gov for more information.

Organic Food Program staff

- Mark Amrhein, Material Review Specialist, Olympia, (360) 902-1882, mamrhein@agr.wa.gov - Evaluates materials for brand name material registration; Inspector; Reviewer.
- Christa Bemis, Organic Office Assistant Senior, Olympia, (360) 902-1805, cbemis@agr.wa.gov - Administrative support; Receptionist.
- Brenda Book, Organic Program Assistant, Olympia, (360) 902-1987, bbook@agr.wa.gov - Administrative support.
- Richard Carr, Organic Food Inspector, Mount Vernon, (360) 561-2404, rcarr@agr.wa.gov - Inspector, North Western Washington; Reviewer.
- Jeff Collins, Organic Food Inspector, Chelan, (509) 682-8457, jcollins@agr.wa.gov - Inspector, North Central Washington.
- Les Eklund, Organic Field Supervisor, Olympia, (360) 902-1891, leklund@agr.wa.gov - Supervises and trains field inspectors; Inspector, Quality Assurance.
- Mike Haskett, Organic Food Inspector, Yakima, (509) 225-2612, mhaskett@agr.wa.gov - Inspector, South Central Washington.
- Rachael Jamison, Organic Program Specialist, Olympia, (360) 902-1951, rjamison@agr.wa.gov - Coordinates work on organic export issues; Inspector; Reviewer.
- Katherine Lange, Organic Food Inspector, Olympia, (360) 902-1877, klange@agr.wa.gov - Inspector, South Western Washington.
- Miles McEvoy, Organic Program Manager, Olympia, (360) 902-1924, mmcevoy@agr.wa.gov - Manages program; Compliance and enforcement; Budget; Personnel; Legislative and rule changes; National Organic Program implementation.
- John Morrison, Organic Food Inspector, Spokane, (208) 882-7322, jmorrison@agr.wa.gov - Inspector, Eastern Washington.
- Marcia Wilkinson, Organic Certification Coordinator, Olympia, (360) 902-1885, mwilkinson@agr.wa.gov - Coordinates processor and handler certification; Reviewer; Document control; Accreditation coordinator.

If you have any questions regarding certification, please contact Christa Bemis at (360) 902-1805, FAX (360) 902-2087, e-mail: cbemis@agr.wa.gov view the Organic Food Program web site at www.wa.gov/agr/foodanimal/organic/default.htm.